

# Potomac Fever

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**H**ELL'S ANGELS...ANYONE WHO wants to stay in Washington has to develop new thresholds for outrage, but the following case of a World War II Navy veteran who has been forced to go to Japan for treatment of A-bomb radiation exposure gives new meaning to the word "justice."

John Smitherton is a Tennessee man who witnessed atomic tests on board the USS Allen M. Sumner, 19 miles from ground zero over a Pacific atoll, on July 1 and again on July 25, 1946. After both blasts, he and other sailors were sent to the island to conduct tests.

"We were back in the lagoon bathing and drinking the water," he says. Radiation burns from walking on the beach in bare feet caused him to be hospitalized at the time. The Navy said it was a kidney ailment.

It would be another 30 years before the truth about problems from radiation exposure began to seep out from the government's sealed archives, and in 1976, John Smitherton, by now having had both legs amputated, sued for disability benefits.

The Veterans Administration turned him down. Six times. The last time was this month.

But as much as this is a case study of government callousness, it is also a story of human dignity.

John Smitherton's case has been taken up by the National Association of Atomic Veterans, a group of radiated soldiers and sailors who realized only they alone could save themselves. The association applied for and received a grant from "Plenty International," which years ago was no more than a hippie farm in Summertown, Tennessee, but now has humanitarian projects around the world.

So in a few weeks, spurned by his own government, John Smitherton will finally get the treatment he deserves. Plenty International is picking up the costs for air transportation.

He will be treated for free by Japanese specialists at the Radiation Research Foundation in Hiroshima.

Behind Closed Doors...If the mutinous chorus of conservative Capitol Hill staff members is any guide, Ronald Reagan is in deep trouble.

Two years ago, Richard Allen assembled a network of key Reagan supporters on the staffs of important House and Senate committees to funnel position papers and advice to the Republican candidate. Over time, they became known as the "Madison Group," so named for the weekly breakfasts at the Madison Hotel organized by Jesse Helms aide John Carbaugh. Their enthusiasm for Reagan was such that they might've drunk Kool-Aid for him.

But 18 months into the Reagan presidency, their disappointment in the administration has turned from a sour acceptance of the need for presidential compromise to outright disgust. The tilt toward Britain in the Falklands-Malvinas crisis seems to have been the latest catalyst.

"It's so bad," remarked Senate Intelligence Committee staffer Angelo Codevilla to me, "that when a bunch of us get together for a backyard barbecue, we don't even talk about him (Reagan) anymore. It's that bad. We got so we were arguing about it all the time and feeling lousy. Now we've agreed not to even talk about Reagan."

From the beginning of the administration, conservative supporters of Reagan have clearly seen Latin America, rather than Western Europe, as the key battleground between the US and the Soviet Union. Cuba was always an obsession. The importance of Latin America on the rightwing agenda was signalled by North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms' early decision to assume chairmanship of the Latin America subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee over equivalent opportunities elsewhere. Similar posts dealing with Latin America at the White House and State Department were snatched by the true believers, and the rhetoric about "going to the source" in Cuba flowed hot and heavy from Al Haig while the administration blew kisses at the generals in Chile, Guatemala, and Argentina, especially. In an administration engineered "entente," in fact, Argentina was to lead the crusade against the communist anti-Christ stalking Central America, "America's backyard."

In their disgust now, members of the Madison Group contemptuously dismiss Al Haig.

Reaganistas are clearly losing the battle in Central America, and the conservatives are panicking. One erstwhile Reagan man, not a member of the Madison Group but an important influence at the American Security Council, which has close ties to the administration, literally gripped his contorted face in near hysteria as he related a scenario for the fall of El Salvador, then Guatemala, Honduras, the Canal Zone, and finally, Mexico to Marxist rebels.

Here, in a man's face over a salad in Dupont Circle, was the rightwing nightmare for "communists in California" made graphic.

The tilt toward Maggie Thatcher has left US policy throughout the hemisphere in disarray. While ambassador-at-large Vernon Walters dismisses the dispute as "a silly war...a problem of two machismos (in which the machismo of women is even more sensitive than the machismo of men)," as he did in a talk last week at the American Enterprise Institute—more serious commentators, both left and right, understand the meaning of a potential loss of Argentina from the traditional American column.

The Argentine grab for the kelpers, and US disapproval, as one Latin observer put it, "has done more to destabilize the US in Latin America than Salvador Allende would ever have dreamed of."

Camp Disneyworld...Peace may be collapsing in the Middle East, but the region's Arab playboys will soon have a place to frolic after the smoke clears.

Thirty kilometers outside of Cairo, a company headed by former Kissinger aide Brent Scowcroft has put together a consortium of Egyptian, European, and Gulf Arab banks to build a big-time amusement park in the shadow of the Pyramids.

"It's a Disneyland, Disneyworld kind of complex," former White House military aide Bill Gulley, a partner in the Washington-based International Six, Inc., told me. Plans call for 4000 hotel rooms, a convention center, a national museum, and a large lake, "recreating a small Nile," Gulley explained. The Chase Manhattan Bank put together a financial package for the park, he said, which will an-

Speaking of Banks...Michigan Congressman John Dingell still has a notion of taking a close look at the internal workings of New York's Citibank, which was accused by one of its own money traders a few years ago of falsely manipulating its ledgers to avoid taxes here and in Western Europe. The Securities and Exchange Commission started its own investigation during the Carter administration after former Citibank employee David Edwards bolted from the bank with an attache-full of embarrassing internal documents, but this year the SEC, under new direction, dropped the case. Dingell, say Capitol Hill sources, is "incensed" about the SEC's actions, but hearings have yet to be scheduled.

Shortcuts...New York Democrat Benjamin Rosenthal has been struggling with the CIA for its classified study of Arab Investments in the US, but just about all he needs to know has been written by Steve Emerson in recent issues of *The New Republic*. Michael Moffitt, of the Institute for Policy Studies here, meanwhile, is about halfway along on his own investigative book on American bankers and banking, due from Simon and Schuster next year. Howard Morland, who rattled the nuclear establishment and the Justice Department with his "Secret of the H-bomb" for *The Progressive* magazine a few years back, is now ensconced at the liberal "Coalition for a New Foreign and Military Policy," on Cap Hill. We mourn the passing of *Panapolitics*, an informed newsletter on the underside of American politics, put out by Jon Marshall of *Inquiry* magazine. Better to have folded the magazine instead.

Headline of the Week... "Britain Terrified By 'Gaucho Bomb,'" from the always-entertaining pages of *Spotlight*, the conservative Washington tabloid. I can understand why this isn't Ronald Reagan's favorite newspaper.